



The Number One Predictor of Diet Failure — and How to Beat It

The Inside Story

The single most common emotional eating trigger and the No.1 predictor of weight loss relapse is stress, according to obesity expert Dr. John P. Foreyt of Baylor College of Medicine.

Being "stressed out" is a common expression nowadays. You hear this phrase often and perhaps even utter it from time to time yourself. However, do you really know what being stressed out means?

It is commonly used in a "negative" sense, and when translated it usually means you are beyond your comfort or tolerance level-physically and/or psychologically.

Stress isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's a natural part of living. Life without any stress is impossible. When you're working hard, tired, hungry, emotionally charged, or sick with the flu, your body secretes hormones in response to these stressors in order to reestablish your body's stability. That's the inside chemistry of stress. Your challenge is to try to maintain a comfortable amount of stress that you can manage.

Recognizing Stress

"I don't know...I start feeling anxious. My temper gets short. I feel hopeless...I know when I'm getting stressed out", says Kathy Dyer of Bowie, Maryland, mother of three ranging in age from five months to 13 years old, and full-time policy analyst and attorney for the Federal government. Kathy is ahead of the game by the mere fact that she realizes when she has stress and can take measures to handle the situation.

Research has shown that African American women have higher levels of adrenaline in their systems as they are stressed and this can result in high blood pressure and even premature death.

"People are not as aware of the unique stresses that African American women have. In addition to the day-to-day stressors we may all encounter, for example, not having enough money or taking care of your children,

African American women also have to deal with how they are viewed in this society as Black women. And that can take a toll on you," says Dr. JudyAnn Bigby, Medical Director, Office for Women, Family and Community Programs, at Brigham & Women's Hospital in Boston.

The first step in managing stress is to recognize that it exists. The big stressors are easy to identify-natural disasters, illness, death, births, marriage, moving, job changes. But daily life, the low-grade, day-to-day responsibilities-and yes, even things you enjoy doing that need your constant attention-are stressors and can eventually take its toll on your health. Debra Churos of Alexandria, Virginia, mother of an eight-year-old daughter and part-time office worker, identified some of the following symptoms when she is stressed.

- anxiety
- short temper
- eating - anything and everything
- feeling hopeless
- crying
- irritability
- headaches
- breathing heavier, heart pounding
- more emotional/stressed around menstrual cycle

According to the American Medical Women's Association, Debra's symptoms are common. Whether you have these symptoms or not, you can be pretty sure that stress has some role and effect on your life and health, and it can play havoc with your weight-control efforts.

Strategies to deal with it

Stress happens. And when it does, you will react to it. The most common reaction is to eat. Actually, it's not a bad idea to eat when feeling stressed. But what you will probably do is to eat something that makes you feel good. You know what those feel-good-foods are: ice cream, potato chips, macaroni and cheese, peach cobbler. This is especially true if you grew up using food as a stress releaser. Instead of reaching for the ice cream, Dr. Bigby recommends coming up with alternatives to release stress.

Try the following

Try healthy comfort-food alternatives: Low-fat proteins (yogurt, turkey), vegetables, and fruit. If you have a refrigerator at the office, keep some of these at the office for when you get hungry. If that's not an option, have

some fruit or cut-up raw vegetables in a plastic bag in your purse or at your desk.

Don't sweat the small stuff: Manage your time better. Make a list of what needs to be done and prioritize them. As Debra says, "I ask myself what's the most important thing to accomplish and what can wait."

Find time to relax and unwind: Go to a place just for yourself (bathroom, the park, a special place in your home). Find 10-20 minutes each day to relax and to just give your mind a break.

Pray, meditate, yoga: It works for many people.

Exercise: Walk, endorphins, feel good...dance, endorphins, feel good...

Establish a support system: Join a woman's group of any kind where you will get support and a chance to relate to others.

Reduce environmental stressors: Dislike your job? Find another one. Noisy neighbors getting on your nerves? Move. Sometimes we can't control our environment, but when we can, it can make all the difference.

Ask for help when you need it: Ask and you shall receive.

As you pick your path to a more stress-manageable and healthy life, keep in mind, you may be as Chaka Khan and Whitney Houston profess--"Every Woman", but, every woman still needs a break.

For more information on stress management, weight loss, and information on health-related topics contact the:

- National Women's Health Information Center, Office of Women's Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources, <http://www.4woman.gov>, 1-800-994-WOMAN
- National Institute of Mental Health, www.nimh.nih.gov, 301-443-4513
- American Institute on Stress, www.stress.org, 914-963-1200
- American Medical Women's Association, www.amwa-doc.org, 703-838-0500 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, www.cdc.gov, 1-888-232-4674.

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Dept. of Health and

Human Services. For more information about the campaign or to request weekly health tips by e-mail, call 1-800-994-WOMAN or TDD at 1-888-220-5446 or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov>.